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ABSTRACT

Many researchers have investigated the factors that keep adults from participating in continuing education or "lifelong learning." Most of the studies have identified factors--previous educational experience, race, ethnic group, and others--that make adults less likely to be participants in schooling. However, the barriers may actually be more hidden and complicated than much of the research would suggest. Rather than a single factor, such as previous schooling experience, determining an individual's likelihood of participating in continuing education, the barriers may in fact be a construction of all the possible sociological factors operating together. Thus, the more factors identified as negative indicators of participation in adult education that affect an individual, the less likely he or she is to participate. Thus, adults could be seen on a continuum from low to high in terms of likelihood of participation in lifelong learning, a continuum that mostly parallels class structure. Thus, the lower the person falls on the continuum in terms of social class, as defined by race, income, education, family background, and so on, the less likely that person is to participate in further education. Since colleges have become marketers of educational products for which supply exceeds demand, they can expand their influence by expanding their appeals to a broader range of people, rather than trying to capture more of the people from the higher areas of the continuum. Appealing to more people would assure greater democratization of education and of society. (KC)

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HIDDEN BARRIERS:
A SOCIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF ADULT PARTICIPATION
IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

for
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FOR THEORY BUILDING
IN HIGHER EDUCATION
A SYMPOSIUM FOR THE
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of
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Lifelong learning is a social movement whose goal is to create a more equal society. As Richard E. Peterson says in his introduction to Lifelong Learning in America (1974):

Lifelong learning as we have tried to conceive it, offers a vision-a prospect of a future education and learning order in which all people, in many ways and using a great variety of resources, can with ease engage in learning throughout their lives. The promise is that through lifelong learning lives can become more meaningful and, in consequence, the society more perfect. (p. 12)

Benson and Hodgkinson (1974) define such a socially efficient educational system as one with non-discriminatory eligibility of all people at all institutions; with balanced participation on a proportionately equal basis by people from all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups; and with output equity where people from all backgrounds have an equal chance to reap the private and social benefits moving through the system. The American system of lifelong learning during a period of enormous change in the last fifteen years, has failed as a force in transforming society and bringing about equality because its policies have not addressed social efficiency. There is strong evidence to support this: during the 1970's when adults began participating in increasingly larger numbers in a wide variety of lifelong learning activities, but especially in continuing higher education, several interesting demographic phenomena occurred. From the Johnstone and Rivera study Volunteers for Learning in 1965 to the Cross study of 30 needs assessments in 1979 there was no change in the demographic portrait of the adult learner. That learner remained white, middle class and previously educated. At the same time, from 1970-80 there was a 24.3% increase in proportion of students over the age of 25 enrolled in college, and part-time students made up 30% of the undergraduate and 60% of the graduate population. Depending upon who was counting,³ estimates of the size of the

adult learning force varied from 17 million to 32 million during this period. In 1977 Michael O'Keefe did an important study which concluded that during this growth period the correlation between age and sex and participation in a lifelong learning activity had weakened, while the correlation between prior education and participation had strengthened.

Thus the first tennant of a socially efficient educational system, non-discriminatory eligibility, had not been addressed by local, state or national policy. If anything, policy that had been put in place to create the conditions for a lifelong learning society had been regressive, creating a system where only those with prior educational experience continue their education, leaving behind all chance for balanced participation and output equity. The barriers identified and removed during this period are not barriers to lifelong learning for all adults; they are middle class barriers. Their removal penetrates the middle class cohort of adults but it does not broaden the demographic base of participation. George H. Hanford, President of the College Board, in an address at the 1982 Wingspread Conference on Post-secondary Programs for the Disadvantaged, says,

The truth about change is, of course, that it occurs whether we will it or not and, furthermore, that the change that we seek to engineer here, like the changes we sought to engineer a dozen years ago, will inevitably bring unexpected outcomes in their wake. (p.4)

He goes on to quote Isaac Asimov, "The important thing to predict is not the automobile, but the parking problem; not the television, but the soap opera; not the income tax, but the expense account; not the bomb, but the arms race" (p.4).

And Hanford concludes with this point, "...we have witnessed the phenomenon of unexpected outocmes in the field of education in our attack on the barriers to opportunity" (p.4).

The unfortunately regressive outcomes of lifelong learning policy can be attributed, at least in part, to the theoretical framework used to conduct research over the last two decades. As early as 1961 Cyril Houle developed a typology of adult learners which placed them in three categories: goal-oriented, activity oriented, and learning oriented. In 1971 and again in 1977 Roger Boshier created and refined his Educational Participation Scale through multiple statistical regressions. This scale can be used to predict participation based on an individual's motivational orientations and from it Boshier proposed a homeostatic model of participation:

deprivation (tension increase)	action (participation)	satisfaction (tension decrease)
life space (growth) motivation		life chance (deficiency) motivation

Boshier's typology of adult learners suggests two groups: those who participate to grow and those who participate to maintain their position.

Other research used other models to explain participation. Miller (1967) developed a force field analysis of personal needs and social forces which can be used to explain participation. And in 1980 Aslanian and Brickell developed a theory using a life sapn analysis which looked for "triggering events" in people's lives to explain participation. Cross (1982) tried to integrate much of what had been done in participation research and also advance its theoretical rigor when she proposed her Chain of Response (COR) model. This model asserts that the decision to participate begins with an individual's self-evaluation and moves outward to the environment in a continuous process which must be understood as a stream of

actions, not a collection of specific behaviors.

These studies, which are merely representative of a larger body of participation research, have empirical designs of one form or another, either using written questionnaires, telephone surveys, or closed, structured interviews. And in extraordinary uniformity they adopt a marketplace analysis of participation, focusing only on people who are already participating. As Cross (1979) says:

I know of no study, for example, that has reported any data to contradict the assertion that the more education people have, the more they want and the more they are likely to participate in available opportunities...The poorly educated, who policy makers and many educators would most like to reach, will fall further and further behind. Given the inevitability of that conclusion at least under prevailing conditions- it would be a contribution for someone to forgo yet one more reverification of the troublesome finding that there is a positive correlation between educational attainment and adult participation and devote more in depth attention to the needs and motivations of adults with a high school education or less. (p.89)

It should come as no surprise then, that policy which evolved from this research failed to broaden the demographic base of the adult learning force, and that barriers to participation which were identified and removed impeded only a narrow cohort of white, middle class, previously educated population, stimulating further penetration of that cohort, but leaving other, less hegemenous cohorts unaffected and disenfranchised.

The underlying assumption of previous research and policy which has grown from it is that all adults have equal freedom to choose to participate. Therefore, studying people who are participants will also yield information about people who are not. This assumption grows from a conservative framework which holds that humans are naturally unproductive and individualistic, that their goals are maximum personal liberty and material well-being, that societal problems are caused by individuals' lack of motivation, and that social change occurs gradually as a result of

individual interactions in the marketplace.

The failure of lifelong learning policy growing out of this empirical research grounded in a conservative, individualistic framework brings into question the theory itself, the population being studied, and the design of the research. The research reported here on "hidden barriers" was conducted to learn why current policy and practice had failed to attract a broader demographic base of participants, and so departed from former research in these three areas.

First, it began with a theoretical paradigm shift, and with the belief that all people do not have equal freedom to choose social goods, whether it be to participate in a learning experience, to buy a car, or even to see a movie. In fact, not just individuals, but whole groups in our society are denied the freedom to choose. This means that studying only people who are continuing their education skews the results and obscures some of the fundamental participation issues, since groups not participating are structurally different, not just typologically different as current participation research would suggest.

The theoretical framework which underpines this "hidden barrier" research assumes that people are naturally productive and cooperative and that the unit of social analysis is not the individual but social groups, or classes. Participation begins at the group or class level and moves progressively inward to the individual's moment of choice; for those who belong to the hegemonous class, there will be the opportunity to choose, but for those who belong to groups or classes which fall on the margins or outside of the mainstream there will seldom be the opportunity to exercise individual free choice equally with their middle class counterparts. From this perspective, Cross's COR model would have

to be turned inside out, taking into account that opportunities and barriers affect an individual before self-evaluation can begin.

This theoretical shift necessitated studying a different population, namely those who are not currently participating in a lifelong learning activity. In order to get beyond the market place analysis it was necessary to study people belonging to groups falling outside the demographically hegemonous participant group. The hidden barriers research was designed to focus on a non-participant group, defined as adults (over age 24) who had never had an organized learning experience after high school graduation. These people were found in factories, welfare offices, and parishes in working class neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

However, the study also looked at a group of people participating in a lifelong learning activity, for the purpose of a comparison, and to help delineate the hidden barriers. In order to define barriers for non-participants, it is essential to know if these are or are not shared by participants. If the barriers are shared, it is necessary to seek other explanations for non-participation, including a re-evaluation of much of the work done from an individualistic analysis, accepting that differences among people rather than between groups explain differing participation patterns and rates.

Glaser and Strauss (1965) outline a precise rationale for using comparison groups:

Multiple comparison groups function in several ways to improve the research and consequent substantive theory. First and foremost the comparisons maximize the credibility of the final theory...Multiple comparison groups also permit and generate the speedy development of analysis...(p.293)

They say that groups "enable the researcher to know under which set of structural conditions her hypotheses are minimized and maximized, hence to what kinds of social structures her theory is applicable" (p.293). They also claim that using groups gives a certain predictive ability to research, which can serve as a guide to gaining more data to fill in theoretical gaps, hence giving the research more credibility.

Groups can expedite the analysis of data because their similarities and differences quickly highlight "the theoretical categories to be used, their full range of types or continuum, their dimensions, the conditions under which they exist, more or less, and their major consequences" (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p.293). Their use also facilitates early generalizations about the relations among categories. This is particularly true in the use of negative cases:

When a negative case is found in a different group, and since a group is an indicator of a set of structural conditions, while reformulating his hypothesis the analyst compares the set of conditions under which it existed to the set under which it is encountered in order to find the particular structural condition(s) making for the change which condition(s) can then be taken account of in reformulating the hypothesis. (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p.294)

The design of this study to include two comparison groups is well-founded in the theory and practice of field studies.

Finally, the hidden barriers research used a qualitative design instead of a quantitative or empirical design which had been relied on almost exclusively in previous research. As Merriam and Jones point out in "The Use of Documentary Sources in Adult Learning and Development Research" (1983),

Since the questions we ask about adult development and learning are questions of meaning, of understanding, and of inner experience, the most appropriate data bases are records of such experiences. These records are found in personal documents such as diaries, case histories, eye

witness accounts, auto-biographies, and memories. These documents can be used in the systematic uncovering of human behavior because they allow one to gain entry into the subject's frame of reference, which in turn provides a more accurate and realistic portrayal of the behavior under study (Wolf & Tymitz, 1976-77, p.8). (p.54)

This study was a field study which used unstructured interviews to gather data from respondents in both groups about the histories of their learning experiences; specifically, it focused on people's reports about their attitudes and beliefs about education which grew out of their class and educational background. The study did not begin by categorizing people quantitatively by class, but looked for the interaction between class variables and the activities and behaviors they reported.

Barton & Lazerfield (1955) call this technique discerning (in McCall and Simmons, 1969, p. 186) whereby a respondent is asked for objective information about a sequence of events, and then asked to explain why those things happened. They define it as the qualitative suggestion of process, where the intervening variable is sought to explain the relationship between other variables. Since the information about hidden barriers is imbedded in the respondents' processes of education and processes of class, using qualitative measures is the most appropriate research design. It could be followed up with statistical studies to determine the pervasiveness of the phenomena, or even the stability of the construct. Glaser and Strauss (1965) point out, however, that such a follow-up is not necessary to give a study worth:

We contend that qualitative research-quite apart from its usefulness as a prelude to quantitative research-should be scrutinized for its usefulness in the discovery of substantive theory. By the discovery of substantive theory we mean the formation of concepts and their interrelation into a set of hypotheses for a given substantive theory...based on research in the area. To view qualitative research as merely preliminary to quantitative research neglects, hence underestimates, several important facts about substantive theory that is

based on qualitative research. (p.288)

They go on to outline that substantive theory is most often the goal of social research, not the starting place, and it is the basis for generating formal grounded theory; further it is often the most adequate and efficient method for obtaining the information. Richard Sennett (1972) says, in defense of The Hidden Inquiries of Class, his qualitative study of class,

This doesn't mean that poll-takers can't ask profound questions; it does mean they face difficult problems in dealing with the ambiguities, subtleties and contradictions involved in answers made in the same spirit. In our investigation [of class], it was just this kind of subtlety that we were after. (p.44)

The research process for this study was not unlike that described by Glaser and Strauss in the The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967) beginning with exploration guided by hypotheses from the current literature. Specifically respondents were questioned about experiences in school based on Paul Willis's cultural production/reproduction theory (Learning to Labor, 1977), about their class status, using Wrights's et. al. process definition (The American Class Structure, 1982), and their current participation activities and behavior in order to explore the relationship among these theories in the respondents' lives. I watched for a central theme to emerge about this relationship, and went into later interviews collecting data to describe the central theme, looking for negative instances, as well as for new data to expand and strengthen the theme. The final stage, after the interviews, was hypotheses generation where I tied my central theme back into the theory from which the study grew. Lillian Rubin (Worlds of Pain, 1976) describes her experience in studying working class families using qualitative methodology:

Talking for many hours with a single respondent made possible the kind of connection and rapport that allowed me to probe into places generally hidden from

the public view; to see and hear things I would ordinarily not have dared to ask about; or, if asked, people would be reluctant to answer. Perhaps most important, it taught me the things I ought to be asking, since in such situations people want to talk about their concerns as well as yours. Sometimes theirs were the same as mine, sometimes not-but always I tried to "hear" what was important to them, and to think anew about the concepts and theory I brought with me into the research field. (p.14)

In 1984, Stafford, Linstedt and Lynn did a participation study called "Social Economic Factors Affecting Participation in Higher Education". They tried to explain participation on a state by state basis looking at aggregate data, not looking at participants themselves. They identified seven independent variables affecting participation and correlated them with the dependent variable of percentage of state population participating in higher education; they then performed a stepwise multiple regression to learn which independent variables had the most effect on participation; lastly they developed a rank order of independent variables for the fourteen states with the highest participation rates, and the fourteen with the lowest. The independent variables they identified are: personal income within a state; tuition costs; state revenues per capita; percentage of state revenues allocated directly to the support of higher education; percentage of population in a state employed in manufacturing; vocational programming available in a state; and relative educational level of the state population. They found that from forty-three to fifty per cent of the variance in percentage participation could be explained by all seven of the independent variables combined, depending upon which year one examined. Not surprisingly, however, each year thirty-three per cent of that variance can be attributed to a single variable: relative educational level of the state population.

Their study emphasizes the importance of social factors in participation, although they set them aside as largely unmeasurable. They note, "The fourth component [of their conceptual framework]--the immediate social and psychological environment of the individual--cannot be included here because no adequate data are available for variables related to the individual's immediate social environment" (1984,p.595). They go on to offer this critique of those studies which have attempted to look at social factors:

Studies about social characteristics that affect an individual's decision to participate have several limitations. First, most of them isolate only a few specific variables and disregard others that are also important. This diminishes the studies' usefulness in trying to derive a more comprehensive theoretical framework to explain participation. Second, present theories at best have only short-run validity. Also, in most every social-factors study, populations are defined differently, making the results difficult to compare. Finally, social-factors studies consider only recent high school graduates as potential enrollees in higher education and ignore other important adult age groups. (p.595)

The data gathered from the interviews for the hidden barriers research demonstrates that the variable of "relative educational level" used by Stafford, Lindstedt and Lynn, or the variable of "prior education" used widely in other participation research is a deeper, more meaningful variable than can be represented by an audit of an individual's number of years of school. In fact, prior education can best be understood as a social factor, or as a cluster of structural features which determines how long a person goes to school.

Because it was a qualitative study, the research did not focus prematurely or finally on a narrow range of variables. The data gathered from each individual was deep and far-reaching, touching on all parts of the person's family background and educational history. From the data, certain structural features emerged as

shared, in one direction or another by the respondents, whether they were in the sample group of participants or non-participants. A structural feature can be defined as a variable which causes adaptational behavior in subcultural groups, and thus can be used to delineate and understand group differences. The structural features which emerged from the data include:

1. racial/ethnic background
2. marital status
3. number of children
4. academic performance in school
5. schooling experience
6. mother's educational level
7. father's educational level
8. occupational inheritance: mother
9. occupational inheritance: father
10. family structure (intact, divorced)
11. number of siblings
12. authority, autonomy, control on the job
13. occupation
14. family income

In order to understand the role of prior education in an individual's participation pattern, one must consider all these structural features.

Previous research which generated various theories of participation based on individualistic models has been appropriately descriptive, but it has failed to consider any more than the most immediate individual situational characteristics (age, race, sex, educational level, income). Whether we choose Aslanian's "triggering event" theory, Miller's force field analysis, Boshier's Educational Participation Scale, or Cross's comprehensive Chain-of-Response model we can explain each participant's motivation for participating in a lifelong learning activity. In fact, we can explain each individual's participation equally accurately, and completely by applying these theories randomly or consecutively, or even simultaneously. What has been generated in the research to date are a number of perfectly adequate, interchangeable theories. They explain non-

participation among the participants, but fail to explain non-participation among the non-participants.

However, it is not the current situational characteristics of these non-participants which can explain why they did not choose to participate. It is the circumstances of their whole lives, in a deeper sense, which must be considered. These life circumstances are defined by the structural features which emerged from the data, and they combine to place an individual in a particular structural position with a given set of opportunity structures. Furthermore, they combine to assign individuals to membership in a social and economic class inherited from their parents. The unit of analysis must then become group differences rather than individual differences. For instance, people who do not participate in continuing higher education must not be viewed as developmentally retarded or intellectually inferior, but must be understood as members of a group with different opportunity structures than those who had the option to go to college.

The structural features which emerged from the data are defined as variables, but they are variables which look at the contextual component of the situational characteristics. They capture experience: activities and behaviors resulting from divergence from the hegemonous culture. The structural features fall naturally into structural categories which were used as the units of analysis for group differences in this study. Barton and Lazerfield (1955) describe what happened during analysis of the data for the hidden barriers study as "construction of descriptive systems" where preliminary classifications emerge (structural features), and then, at least, partial substructions or "the partial systematization of a concept or set of categories" are formed (in McCall and Simmons, 1969, p.179). The structural

categories represent a beginning in the "construction of descriptive systems". The categories, with their defining features include:

- family background
 - racial/ethnic background
 - educational inheritance: mother
 - educational inheritance: father
 - occupational inheritance: mother
 - occupational inheritance: father
 - family structure (intact, divorced)
 - family instructions about education
- schooling
 - academic achievement
 - attitude towards schooling
 - quality of schooling experiences
 - attitude toward credentialism
- occupation
 - career goals and job security
 - authority on job
 - autonomy on job
 - control over decisions affecting individual
 - income

The demographics of age and sex must also be taken into account as situational characteristics which cause adaptive behaviors. However, these features did not emerge as a contextual structural category and so are considered only as descriptive, rather than structural features.

There are few categorical differences between the participants and the non-participants who were interviewed for this study, and many categorical differences among the non-participants. The participation pattern therefore cannot be used to define meaningful groups and it is necessary to turn to structural categories for meaning. Two groups clearly emerged from the data: one that will be called structural participants, whether or not they are participating in continuing higher education at the moment; and the other that will be called structural non-participants because they are unlikely to ever participate.

What determines structural group membership is not a single structural feature that all members of one or the other group share or even a combination of these features. The determining difference between the structural participants and structural non-participants is the number of structural features which fall outside the parameters of the hegemonous class. What emerged from the data are individual variables which even these groups share, and which are randomly distributed among the people in the groups.

So, for instance, neither racial/ethnic background, nor educational and occupational inheritances from parents, nor family structure, nor class position, nor income, in and of itself determines the structural position a person will be in to choose continuing higher education. It is the number of "structural strikes" that determines that position; and a structural feature can be considered a strike if it diverges from the hegemonous culture. If an individual has strikes in all structural categories, or strikes out completely in a single category, the opportunity structures for that person will be severely limited.

A large number of the people interviewed emerged with choices about their future, and a smaller number with no choice, or with a perception of no choice. It was as if the two groups, not divided now by their participation pattern in continuing higher education, had rehearsed different ideologies in terms of what was possible and what was allowable for them.

Following Wright's et.al. (1982) definition of class as an experience of a process, and using their measuring stick of authority, autonomy and decision-making control on the job, there is no one in the study who is not working class. Even four of the respondents who described jobs with relatively high authority, autonomy and control have this freedom on a very narrow range of

issues, and they have supervisors they must report to, and job issues that are out of their hands entirely. In fact, continuing education as is has tried to expand access to higher education, has become a working class issue, by definition. However, authority, autonomy and control on the job, as well as income, form a continuum from low to high, and a person's place on that continuum, left or right of center stratifies the working class. Rubin (1976) argues that the main class division occurs between the upper middle class (capitalist owners and entrepreneurs) and the combined lower middle and working classes; that places approximately eighty per cent of the American population in the working class. From there structural features, such as occupation, and income take over and adaptational behaviors, as a result of these, form the strata within the larger class structure.

The farther left on the class continuum a person is, in these terms, the more structural strikes she or he will have, and it is these strikes which form the hidden barriers to participation in continuing higher education. Add to the class position other structural strikes including: poor school performance, negative schooling experiences, one or both parents without a high school education, a separated or divorced family, many siblings competing for scarce resources, and a minority racial or immigrant ethnic background. If all these structural strikes are against one person, she or he will be a structural non-participant.

As long as the structural strikes a person has against her or him will prevent choice, there are hidden barriers. They are hidden in the sense that they do not exist in individuals or in specific activities at institutions, but are embedded in the practices and processes of institutions in ways that are too

subtle to change with a changing schedule of courses or streamlined admissions procedures to name just two attempts institutions have made to remove barriers. And they are hidden in the sense that professionals, using individualistic analyses, have always been able to find negative cases with which to explain away regressive policies. As long as there are participants with enormous structural disadvantages, those barriers will remain hidden from the practitioners and researchers in the field who subscribe to a conservative, individualistic paradigm.

The theoretical significance of structural patterns of participation and structural strikes is that they expose a different paradigm for analysis, new to the field of continuing education. If the professionals are challenged by this study to look at participation from a different perspective, with new eyes, if you will, perhaps the barriers will no longer be hidden, and they can begin to address regressive policy. Every institution defines a hegemonous class through its policies, practices and processes; and those people who diverge from that class will be excluded from participation either by individual choice or by structural position. There are no institutions for which the structural paradigm proposed here would not apply. There are only institutions who would choose not to apply it.

Halsey (1973), at the Georgetown University Conference on Recurrent Education, called for policy changes which would reduce the non-educational determination of educational success. Thirteen years later that call has gone unanswered, and the barriers to participation for structural groups are still determining educational success, and the terminal point in the educational process for whole groups of people. The system of recurrent education, or lifelong learning as it has been

interpreted in America has not been able to overcome the equity failures of the traditional system of education. In spite of open access, it has not helped to create equal opportunity or equity. Lifelong learning has not fulfilled its potential as social policy but is merely a micro tool for institutions to use for their own advancement. As long as the onus for matching participants and educational environments rests with continuing education professionals who organize experiences for adults based on the dominant cultural patterns they know and understand, equity will not be addressed. In fact, the trends in continuing education divisions are moving increasingly to a market analysis, so that even the most marginal institutions are adopting this analysis. Marketing, particularly in light of changing immigration patterns not even addressed in this study, will only yield more regressive participation patterns as the racial/ethnic make up of society becomes more diverse.

A market awareness on the part of institutions of higher education brings with it, however, new possibilities for achieving equity that were not present when education was delivered based merely on supply and demand market forces, and when demand exceeded the supply. Now that supply exceeds demand, institutions are forced to assess the constituencies they serve, or might serve in order to maintain their present market positions. This attention to the external environment opens the door to new analyses based on new paradigms. Instead of seeking congruence with the highest order needs of the clients currently served in order to attract larger aggregate numbers, continuing education professionals must begin to assess the structural features of the populations which geographically fall within their purview. They should seek congruence with the highest order needs of all

potential clients, both structural participants and structural non-participants and propose programs and processes aimed at groups who have rehearsed ideologies that fall outside the mainstream. Only then can lifelong learning help to create a more equal society.

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